

Exegetical Notes, Matthew 25:14-46

“The Little Apocalypse: The Judgment of the Gentiles”

Prepared by Charles H. Jensen, Pastor, Cornerstone Fellowship

101 Kylies Road, Coatesville, PA 19329

610-384-1375

charleshjensen@aol.com

Matthew 25:14-46

(This section of Matthew 25 ends what is called the “Little Apocalypse” or the “Olivet Discourse”. It is the last great discourse or section of teaching by Jesus in Matthew’s Gospel. Its subject is the “end times” or the end of time.)

Verse 14

“Again, it will be like a man going on a long journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them.”

- As Jesus prepared to end his teaching on the end times he told a series of stories designed to help his hearers understand and remember the point of his teaching. In Matthew 24:45-51, he told a story similar to the one he told in Matthew 25:14-30. However, the story in Matthew 25 is greatly elaborated.
- As in the first story, in this one, a man is preparing to go on a long trip. However before he departs, he entrusts some of his wealth to certain hand-picked servants.

Verse 15

“To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey.”

- The Master of the servants did not entrust each servant with an equal amount of money. *(The actual worth of a talent is not the point here and does not aid our understanding of Jesus’ point in telling the story. A talent was a large sum of money.)* The first servant received five talents, the second received two talents, and the third only one.
- In telling the story, Jesus made it clear that the amount entrusted to each servant was determined by the servant’s ability, as the Master saw things. Thus, the servant best able to handle the greatest responsibility was entrusted with the greatest amount of money and

the one least able was entrusted with the least amount of money. However, it is clear that not all of the servants were treated alike in this respect.

- Having so divided his wealth among the servants, the master left on his trip.

Verse 16-18

“The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money.

- A comparison is given between the first two servants and the third. The first two used what the master had entrusted to them, respectively, and so added to their master’s wealth. But the third servant buried what had been entrusted to him. His motivation was to protect what had been given him so that it would be in tact when the master wanted it.
- The result of this behavior was that the first two servants doubled their holding for the master while he was away. While the third servant did not make money with what was entrusted to him, he still had the entire amount given to him safely stashed away.

Verse 19-23

“After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.’ His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’” The man with the two talents also came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with two talents; see I have gained two more.’ His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’”

- When the master returned there was a time of reckoning. The master called the servants to give account of how they had managed what he had entrusted to him.
- The first two servants came to the master and returned to him the amounts entrusted to them with the gain they had made in his absence. The master was overjoyed at their success.

- Notice that his joy was not diminished because the amounts returned to him were different. He rejoiced at the use to which each servant had put the amount entrusted to him and the servants' success in managing the master's trust.
- Also note that each servant is given the same reward although they were entrusted with differing amounts and returned differing amounts. Each is called 'good and faithful' and each is invited to 'share his master's happiness.'

Verse 24-25

“Then the man who had received the one talent came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’”

- It is important to note that this third servant's motivation is fear. He did not act out of love for the master, nor does he show respect for his master (*In fact his address to the master is full of insulting language. He did what he did because he was afraid!*).
- It is also important to note that this servant is returning to his master everything that was entrusted to him, no part of which has been lost.

Verse 26-30

“His master replied, ‘You wicked lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest. Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth’.”

- The master's reaction to the third servant is especially harsh.
- First he mocks the servant's insulting remarks. The master does not say that, in fact, he is a hard man who is dishonest in his business dealings as the servant implies. He simply acknowledges that this is what the servant believed and, given that, this belief should have determined how the servant behaved. If the servant had just put the money in the bank, it would have earned interest. But this servant did the easiest thing. He dug a hole in the ground and buried his master's

- money, out of fear. In so doing, he revealed his true character. He is wicked and lazy.
- The result of his unfaithfulness is the loss of that which had been entrusted to him, and the loss of his master's respect. He is thrown out as being useless which he has proved himself to be because he did not use what was entrusted to him.
 - In telling this story, Jesus introduces two new elements to the end time teaching: 1. At the end time, Christ will call for an accounting of how his servants have used what has been entrusted to them. There will be a time of judgment. 2. The basis of this judgment requires us to understand that playing it safe and doing little or nothing with what has been entrusted to us will not be enough. Clearly God expects his servants to use what he has entrusted to them to achieve certain results that will add to the wealth of his kingdom. Those who do so will be invited into his happiness or blessing. However those who fail to do so will be cast outside where there is much unhappiness. The blessing of God will fall in abundance upon those who are actively found doing his will. While those who are afraid to take risks for his kingdom's sake, never find the fullness of his blessing.

Verse 31-33

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

- This is the final lesson in the Little Apocalypse. It follows the illustration of the master and the servant as an explanation of the final teaching about the end times.
- Note that when Jesus comes at the end of time, he will not come in the earthly body that he inhabited while he was on earth. He will come in his resurrected body and restored glory. See Revelation 1:12-18 and Ezekiel 1.
- His coming will be like the return of the master in the parable above. He will call all of his servants before him to give account of how they have handled what has been entrusted to them.
- He will divide them into two groups as above: those servants who were faithful, the sheep, and those who were unfaithful, the goats.

Verse 34

“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.’”

- Those found faithful will be invited into the “happiness of their master.”

Verse 35-36

“For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.

- Jesus explains the basis upon which the judgment will occur; how it is that goats and sheep are divided. Sheep are those who did kind things for him.
- This is not salvation by works. We do not earn our salvation by doing kind things for Jesus. However, Jesus told us that faith in him, the basis for receiving God’s gift of salvation, always issues in action. He said, “If you love me you will keep my commandments,” John 14:15.

Verse 37-39

“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’”

- The sheep were entirely unaware of having done kind things for Jesus. They had not developed a deliberate plan to impress him with their goodness. It had come from a generous heart that did not even know it was acting generously.

Verse 40

“Then the King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’”

- Here is the great secret of the judgment. When one helps the least of Jesus’ “brothers,” he is doing a kind act for Jesus.
- The issue then relates to the word “brothers.” Who are Jesus’ “brothers?” Most scholars, including Charles Ryrie and the NIV Study Bible notes, conclude that since this lesson comes at the end of the Little Apocalypse and begins with the assembling of the nations before the throne of the King (see verse 32), the “brothers” referred to

hear are the Jews. The meaning is then that those who have done kind things for the Jews during the Great Tribulation will have done kind things for Jesus. In this case the Jews would include the complete Israel. It would include the Gentiles who were “grafted in” as the adopted children of God.

- This would then motivate nations to help the Jews. However, the acts done here are subconscious acts. Those who do them do them out of an overflowing heart, not as the result of some plan to be blessed because of them.

Verse 41-46

“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison, and you did not look after me.’

They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’

He will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’

Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

- The above scene is repeated for the goats. Because they did not care for the people of God during the time of the Great Tribulation, they are cast out of heaven into the fiery pit into which Satan and his angels are also cast.
- Thus we see that at the end of time all of the peoples of the world will be judged. The determining factor in their judgment will be how they have treated the completed nation of Israel during the Great Tribulation. Those people groups who have been kind to God will receive his blessing. Those who have not will be cast out of God’s presence forever. This is known as the “Great White Throne Judgment of God.” It will fall on the world when Jesus comes to establish his Millennial Kingdom at the end of time!

(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon entitled *The Little Apocalypse: The Judgment of the Gentiles*. They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen, Senior Pastor at Cornerstone Fellowship, Coatesville Pennsylvania. All rights are reserved by Dr. Jensen and Cornerstone Fellowship.)